



*FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER'S*

C O U R S E   I N   P R A Y E R

by Francis Merchant

L E S S O N 4

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## LESSON 4

## SOUL MENDING

In every quarter of the globe one finds hospitals—testimony that man is acquainted with suffering. Medical books list a host of diseases to which he is subject and which can cause him varying degrees of pain. Drugstores are filled with remedies for these multiple afflictions. In every age the shadow of ill health is discernible, and the history of every human being involves an acquaintance with pain.

Even great souls have not been immune to suffering. The agony of the Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane and upon the cross have been themes for many paintings. The Buddha declared that life itself is a form of suffering, for birth, death, war, disillusionment, and ignorance are all productive of pain. Thomas More died on the scaffold, and Socrates was condemned to drink the poisoned cup of hemlock. All faiths have had their martyrs, who were punished for their beliefs.

How, then, do we in this day and age confront the sufferings that fall to our lot? Psychologists tell us that some people make the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain a guiding principle of conduct—only to find that the two are interlinked and eventually flow into each other. Dostoevsky held that suffering is a path to God, a means of burning out the egotism that separates a man from the Highest. The important consideration is not that someone suffers, the novelist believed, but that he should prove worthy of his sufferings. If the agonies to which a person is subjected do not change him inwardly, he has endured them in vain. The transformation of pain into spiritual gold is an art that deserves the most careful study. Sorrows as well as joys are teachers to those who have the willingness to learn.

In many quarters it is automatically assumed that the elimination of all suffering should be a goal of human endeavor. It is easy to understand and accept this view, but let us for a moment subject it to a closer scrutiny. If all the suffering in the world

could by some miraculous means be ended instantaneously, would the human race be better off? A look at history may provide some interesting evidence. In the Second World War thirty million disappeared from the face of the earth. Such a catastrophe is sobering to contemplate, but human beings do not seem to have learned from it the lessons of brotherhood as well as one might expect. If such a massive tragedy does not bring about significant changes in human consciousness, one wonders what will.

We may consider these questions as they apply to the individual. Were the life of a given person so agreeably arranged that the shadow of suffering would never fall on him, would he become a nobler specimen of humanity? No doubt we should like to think so, but there is much evidence against a positive conclusion. It is well known to psychologists that mothers who overprotect their children, making life easy for them, often do more harm than good. In fact, it requires the greatest wisdom to know how to help human beings, and we may do them a disservice if we remove the obstacles that they need in order to become mature. Nature provides us with illustrations. It not only gives us the sunshiny days of spring, but it also flails us with the biting winds of winter.

The Stoics held that duty takes precedence over pleasure or pain. If a man recognizes an obligation, he should fulfill it, whether the task or the results prove agreeable or disagreeable. In a sense, this is the attitude of the soldier, who is prepared to lay down his life for his country. The envisioned end is regarded as more important than the possibly unpleasant means.

Not much is said about the ministry of pain, and yet it is one of the powerful shaking forces in the evolution of the soul. It is the chisel that chips away the egotism of the self-centered. It is a common language understood by all people the world over. The sceptic may deny God, but not the existence of pain. It is one of the great teachers, and those who refuse to be guided by wisdom attend to its sterner admonitions. He who rejects reason invites pain. When the soft voice of persuasion remains unheeded, the harsh tones of pain make themselves heard. The corrective power of suffering is a restorer of balance. It is often the soul's

means of disciplining its instrument, the personality.

Perhaps we may consider all suffering as a kind of prayer, for the cry of distress rises upward to the courts of heaven and mingles with the invocative aspiration of the devotee. Were the anguish of pain focused, it might produce incalculable effects. The prayer of the one who suffers often achieves an intensity far greater than that of the one who is under less tension. Just as the call for help stirs us more deeply than ordinary utterance, the directed invocation of the distressed soul may bring forth a stronger and more effective response.

### *Causes of Suffering*

Those who suffer are understandably more interested in the cure of their affliction than in a careful diagnosis of its cause—and yet it would be wiser to try to prevent the recurrence of the ailment by understanding what produced it. The habit of taking pills to relieve pain emphasizes the removal of effects instead of the study of causes. An illustration may make this clearer. A person suffering from an ulcer was told that his nervous disposition was the cause of his sickness. It was suggested that he alter his general attitude, but he preferred to undergo an operation that disconnected his vagus nerve. In this way he did not need to moderate his nervous irritability, but would still obtain relief.

The causes of sickness and suffering are varied. However, even in physical accidents there is often a psychic cause. For example, a large proportion of automobile accidents arises from drunken driving. Ulcers and heart disease are related to nervous tension. Melancholia is to quite an extent a state of mind, and so is paranoia. Mental illnesses flow from the character and disposition of the person involved. There are also, of course, many ailments incident to old age, when the soul is in the process of discarding the physical vesture. Psychological pain may affect great souls when they contemplate the state of humanity and realize to what extent human beings reject proffered help. It should also be understood that the soul, in its long journeying, has incurred debts that must be paid.

In speculating on the causes of disease, we may generalize

by saying that it arises from an unregulated flow of the circulatory energy to all parts of the system. Anger, passion, envy, and malice may have a generally obstructing effect. Mind and body are interrelated, and the quality of a man's thoughts finds objective expression in the personality. At this point medicine and religion meet, for the good life is directly related to good health. The seven cardinal sins are not simply moral vices; they manifest as physical afflictions. It is not helpful to regard health as wholly separate from the directional tendencies of man's thought. Explosive temper and violent anger are matters of temperament, but their effects on the body are detrimental. In only too many cases men could be healed if they were willing to alter a few aspects of what might be called their life-style. Eliminating unpleasant symptoms without carefully studying the causes that produced them may yield undesirable results. Persons who seek miraculous cures without a consideration of causes are unrealistic.

These preliminary considerations illustrate the complexity of the subject. In many cases suffering is connected with the purposes of the soul and acts as an educative corrective. What we should hope and pray for is that the intention of the soul be fulfilled, not that the pain mysteriously disappear. We do not automatically assume that the greatest good is the disappearance of suffering, but that the cause, of which the external condition manifests as an effect, should receive more attention.

### *Methods of Healing*

Let us start by saying that wisdom diminishes pain. The Epicureans understood this principle and advocated a life of moderation and self-control. When intelligence and emotion are in conflict, each pulling in a different direction, discordant friction is the inevitable result. Perhaps this is why the Old Testament admonishes, "With all thy getting, get wisdom." It is good counsel and promotive of health.

In this sense a creative life view is one of the greatest aids for those who pass through grim periods of sickness. To suffer and to know not why is frustrating and annoying. A bitter experience that has meaning is far more readily endured than one

that is totally meaningless. To have no idea what life is prepared to give one and, on the other hand, what one owes to life, is bewildering. Meaninglessness is a heavy burden for human shoulders to bear. The first prophylactic for the millions of hospital patients in the world is a view that relates them creatively and relevantly to the universe that produced them.

Wisdom is thus a healing influence. It is expressed by means of reasoned and intuitive thought. Because of this, perhaps, the reading of the scriptures and of poetry is a helpful experience.

Speech, too, can be a healing force. During a lifetime we utter innumerable sounds, and it is not too much to say that our destiny is spelled out by our utterances. The words so readily poured forth affect other human beings for better or worse. The kind word soothes, and the obscene word repels. The foul epithet corrodes, and the courteous reply assuages. The thoughtful voice encourages a thoughtful response; in fact, the qualities a man has developed in his own nature call forth similar qualities in his auditors. For this reason, orators can sway crowds, sometimes leading them to violent, ill-advised action.

The deliberate use of thoughtful speech is therefore a method of healing. This involves the elimination of words and ideas derived from contempt, anger, malice, envy, or slander. The discipline of speech thus becomes a means of bringing healing energies to those who listen to our words.

### *A Key Approach*

Let us consider the metaphysical statement that the universe is one—in other words, man lives in an ordered cosmos. Behind outer diversity lies inner unity. The many flows consequently from the One. The inevitable question that then arises is, If Good created the world, how did evil find so strong a foothold? The answer to this query is rather complex. As created, the world was good; that is, from the standpoint of God, evil is non-existent. Man, in his limited and separate state, beholds the outer world through the prism of his own imperfections. In a sense, he projects his own limitations upon his surroundings.

Two aspects thus come into focus: God's world and man's world. The one concerns the vision of the whole; the other, the vision of a minute fraction.

What would happen if man, even for an instant, should gain the power to see all things as God sees them? Evil would vanish in the supernal light of the cosmic plan. Man would behold himself, not in isolation, but in his unity; not in his separateness, but in his relationship to all that is.

Following this line of thought, we note that evil disappears as man seeks to conform his mind to that of God. Inasmuch as sickness is an evil, it would be screened out in such a process.

We have a clue here to a form of spiritual healing that depends upon a rejection of the illusion of man's separateness and an attempt to become at-one with the divine purpose that brought all things into being.

It follows from these considerations that an individual, by endeavoring to transform his mind, can bring healing to the body. Expressed in a different fashion, to the extent that a person could approximate the mind that was in Christ, to that extent he could free himself of his afflictions.

It has also been held that any person could exercise a healing influence if he were capable of beholding the afflicted sufferer from God's or the soul's point of view. Christian Scientists, for example, often move in this direction.

The method involved is not very complicated. The one who desires to heal says, in effect, "I reject the limited testimony of the mortal mind and affirm that the one who suffers is perfect in the sight of God." This is actually an attempt to see the individual, as Spinoza put it, under the aspect of eternity. We are accustomed to say that each unit of humanity is immortal and eternal, but how many persons endeavor in practical terms to see their fellow mortals in this manner?

What happens when a person says, in effect, to another, "I behold in you the perfect idea God had in mind when he created you"? Much experimentation ought to be done with this concept. Both the healer and the healed could provide us with much valuable testimony. Enough evidence is already available to indicate the potency of this technique, but much remains to be done.

If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, healing may be in the vision of the illuminated human being. Perhaps these considerations help to explain the Biblical exhortation, "The Lord make His face to shine upon thee....The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace."

#### *Area of Experiment*

The assumptions made serve as a foundation for experimentation. Giving rein to the imagination, we try to go beyond the stereotypes that condition our thinking in this time-space continuum. For example, can we perceive flesh and blood in terms of energy? Even science admits this hypothesis. However, if man is an aggregation of energy units, and sickness is a hindering of the circulatory flow, then healing should come from a removal of the impediments that obstruct the free passage of the appropriate energies. If man is immortal and eternal, then the body is but the instrument utilized in time and space by the entity that transcends the objectified form. It is that part of the individual of which the body is a fractional expression—which ought to receive our regard.

How shall we visualize a person as an idea in the mind of God? Can we conceive that, underlying the objective circulation of the blood, there is a subjective circulation of light or electricity—and that healing may arise when subjective obstructions are removed? Is it possible that by holding a person in the light—an act of the spiritual imagination—significant results may objectively appear? Can we produce outer effects by inwardly sending forth the light of our blessing and our compassion?

Having done all that is possible for an afflicted person in physical terms, we may leave unexplored a much greater area that involves the use of the heart, mind, and imagination. Such a possibility is, to say the least, intriguing. It points the way to metaphysical remedies for the ills of mankind. Physical remedies and monetary expenditures become less important than a compassionate heart and benevolent thinking. Furthermore, cures so brought about would affect the soul, and not just the body. Then, too, mental and spiritual help are within the capacity of everyone,

being dependent for the most part on the will to help.

Many experiments along these lines are in order. For example, one person may paraphrase a Biblical statement by saying, "My light I share with you," imagining the benevolent energy of his thought streaming out to someone in need. Another person may imagine a line of light proceeding from soul to personality, eliminating obstructions. Still another may visualize the free circulatory flow of subjective light coursing through the constitution of the one who happens to be afflicted.

It should always be a primary concern to go beyond the stereotypes that have so generally characterized attitudes towards the sick and distressed. The feeling of helplessness must be replaced by a more confident reliance on new methods and techniques. The preoccupation with the objective will give way to an increased emphasis on the subjective. The person who seeks to heal will regard the outer manifestation as a kind of illusion in time and space. The Bhagavad Gita points to the higher self and lower self in man when it says, "Having pervaded the universe with a portion of myself, I remain." Thus there are indicated the self that moves in time and is mortal and the self that is outside of time and is immortal. It is with the latter and more subtle aspect that we seek to deal.

## ASSIGNMENT

1. *Optional.* Keep a record of the inner experiences that arise from your prayer activities.
2. *Experiment.* Visit those who may be afflicted. Try to visualize them in terms of the concept, "I behold in you the perfect idea God had in mind when He created you."
3. *Stretching the Imagination.* Bathe someone who is afflicted with a continuing stream of light.
4. *Sharing (Encounter with Prayer).* Please share realizations and results flowing from this work.

5. *A Suggested Form for Prayer and Meditation (alter to suit your needs):*

Stage 1: Linking with the Soul. Identify yourself with the equilibrated soul. (I am the cause of which the body is the effect. A function of the inner self is to mend broken souls.)

Stage 2: Select the afflicted person you seek to help. Hold that person in the light, sending him or her your blessing and compassion. Imagine that person's soul energy freely circulating. Visualize this as conforming to a perfect pattern.

*When you have completed the above assignment, you are invited to send it to The Editor, Room 10-E, 200 East 36th Street, New York, N.Y. 10016. All replies will be confidential.*

